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Volume 28 - Number 08 | 6 March 2025 | 6 Adar 5785

South African Jewish Report

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Ramaphosa's anti-Israel rant 'a red flag to a bull'

NICOLA MILTZ

South African President Cyril Ramaphosa was the lead writer of an inflammatory article published in highly regarded international publication *Foreign Policy* on 25 February, accusing the United States (US) of complicity in genocide and lambasting Israel.

Writing with Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim; Colombian President Gustavo Petro; and Varsha Gandikota-Nellutla of Progressive International, the article paints Israel as the sole aggressor in the Israel-Hamas war. Ramaphosa makes no mention of Hamas or the atrocities the terrorist organisation committed on 7 October 2023. The article is a doubling down broadside against the US.

It demands legal and economic action against Israel, with its authors vowing to block arms shipments and enforce the International Criminal Court's arrest

warrants for Israeli leaders.

This article was published just one day before the funeral of the Bibas family, whose murder at the hands of Hamas terrorists remains a fresh wound for Israeli and Jewish communities worldwide. It happened to land on the same day that the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) issued notices to US President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR)-funded HIV organisations terminating their funding for good. This will gut funding to South Africa's HIV/AIDS programmes.

Bizarrely a day or so later, speaking at the 2025 Goldman Sachs conference, Ramaphosa struck a different tune, saying that he wanted the "dust to settle" and was eager to "do a deal" with US President Donald Trump to resolve tensions over South Africa's land policy and its genocide case against Israel in the International Court of Justice. It was as if he had no hand in penning the *Foreign Policy* article.

"I don't imagine that President Ramaphosa actually wrote the piece, but he would have had sight of it. And he gave his fulsome endorsement to it by lending it his name," said Terence Corrigan, project manager at the Institute of Race Relations.

Ramaphosa's Goldman Sachs interaction implied that South Africa wanted to reach a broad-ranging agreement with the US on diplomacy and trade amid strained ties between the two nations.

A dispute over Pretoria's land and foreign policies has put it firmly in Trump's crosshairs.

"We don't want to go and explain ourselves," Ramaphosa said at the event on Thursday, 27 February. "We want to go and do a meaningful deal with the United States on a whole range of issues, and the signals we're getting are that we need to enable the development of that process. It's inevitable that we will get together and do a deal."

"It is like a split consciousness," said Corrigan, "Ramaphosa understands the significance of the relationship with the US but can't tone down the rhetoric."

"South Africa's foreign policy is ideological, not pragmatic. The African National Congress [ANC] has made its hostility to the US and its core allies abundantly clear. The concern is that South Africa lacks the diplomatic depth and global alliances needed to shield itself from the repercussions."

Foreign affairs experts say Ramaphosa is playing a reckless game, one that could have disastrous consequences for the South African economy.

The US is now more likely than ever to strip South Africa of its African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) trade benefits, a move that would hamstring key industries and cost tens of thousands of jobs. AGOA grants duty-free access to the US market for African countries that align with American interests.

Michael Kransdorff, the chief executive of the Institute for International Tax and Finance and a

The SA Jewish Report Thank you for participating in the SA Jewish Report Reader's Survey Since 7 October, being the voice of our community and speaking up has become tougher, the pressure to stay silent is real, especially in South Africa amidst a sea of media hostility and toxic propaganda. We want to know your honest opinion on how we've done. This survey should take you less than 10 minutes to complete. **Switch account.** * Indicates required question Email * 1. How do you consume the SA Jewish Report? (more than 1 answer is permissible) I read the hard copy paper edition of the newspaper I read the e-mail newsletter I visit the website I read it on social media - Facebook/ Twitter/ Instagram/ TikTok I watch the JR Live Webinars Other: 2. How often do you interact with the SA Jewish Report through one of its channels? (Please use the multiple choice lists for each channel of communication) Regularly Occasionally Never Hard copy Newspaper Newsletter Social Media JR Live Webinars Jewish Achiever Awards Hard copy Newspaper Newsletter Social Media JR Live Webinars Jewish Achiever Awards 3. How do you rate the quality of the SA Jewish Report content Excellent Good Average Poor Terrible 4. On a scale of 1 to 10 how well do you think we have covered issues in South Africa, Israel and the Jewish World since 7 October 5. On a scale of 1 to 10 how well do you think the SA Jewish Report does in providing a platform to reflect the rich diversity and character of the SA Jewish Community? 6. Do you find the content of the SA Jewish Report? (more than 1 answer is permissible) Too politically left leaning Politically centrist and inclusive Too politically right leaning Too Religious Religiously centrist and inclusive Too Secular 7. On Israel related news: I would like to see more Israel news I would like to see less Israel news I am happy with the coverage Other: 8. On South African news: I would like to see more South African news I would like to see less South African news I am happy with the coverage Other: 9. On Jewish Community related news I would like to see more Jewish Community news I would like to see less Jewish Community news I am happy with the coverage Other: 10. How do you feel about the SA Jewish Report? I love it I like it I don't mind it I don't like it I hate it 11. How long have you been reading the SA Jewish Report? Under 1 year 1-3 years 3-5 years 5-10 years 10+ years 12. Please describe yourself in terms of your religious observance and political views. Conservative Orthodox Liberal Reform Other: 13. How do you feel about the SA Jewish Report's content? Excellent Good Average Poor Terrible 14. How do you feel about the SA Jewish Report's layout and design? Excellent Good Average Poor Terrible 15. How do you feel about the SA Jewish Report's advertising? Excellent Good Average Poor Terrible 16. How do you feel about the SA Jewish Report's editorial board? Excellent Good Average Poor Terrible 17. How do you feel about the SA Jewish Report's social media presence? Excellent Good Average Poor Terrible 18. How do you feel about the SA Jewish Report's website? Excellent Good Average Poor Terrible

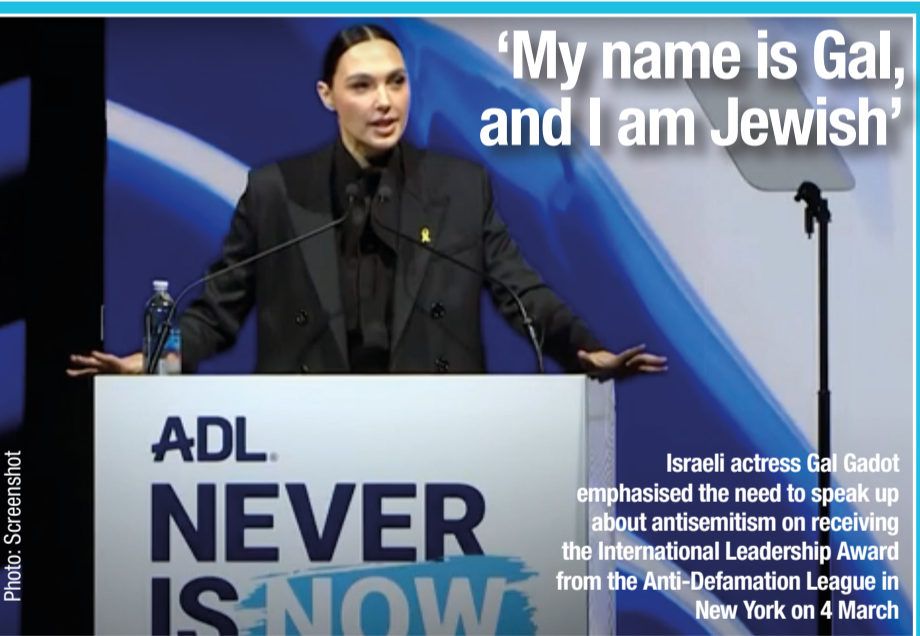
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'My name is Gal, and I am Jewish'

Israeli actress Gal Gadot emphasised the need to speak up about antisemitism on receiving the International Leadership Award from the Anti-Defamation League in New York on 4 March

Continued on page 8>>

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'Don't let hate go unchecked,' Brody tells Academy

Adrien Brody nabbed an Academy Award on Sunday, 2 March, for his portrayal of an architect in *The Brutalist*, marking the second Oscar for the Jewish actor.

MIKEY MADISON, who is Jewish, also won best actress for her role in *Anora*, which won best picture.

Both of Brody's best actor wins came for portrayals of Holocaust survivors. In 2003, he received the best actor award for his performance in *The Pianist*, in which he played Władysław Szpilman, who was among a handful of Jews to survive the Warsaw ghetto and went on to resume a classical music career. That movie focused almost entirely on Szpilman's Holocaust experience.

The Brutalist, on the other hand, centres on the postwar period, as Brody's character, László Tóth, makes his way as an architect in the United States. In his acceptance speech, Brody acknowledged the resonance of the two roles, saying, "I'm here once again to represent the lingering traumas and the repercussions of war, and systematic oppression, and antisemitism and racism and othering, and I believe that I pray for a healthier and a happier and a more inclusive world. I believe if the past can teach us anything, it's a reminder to not let hate go unchecked."

Madison, who grew up in Los Angeles, won for portraying a sex worker, and said in her speech, "I also just want to again recognise and honour the sex worker community. Yes. I will continue to support and be an ally. All of the incredible people, the women that I've had the privilege of meeting from that community, have been one of the highlights of this entire incredible experience."

And the best supporting actor award went to Kieran Culkin for his role in *A Real Pain*, about two Jewish cousins on a tour of Holocaust sites in Poland.



No Other Land wins best documentary

No Other Land, which chronicles Israel's demolitions in the Palestinian West Bank village of Masafer Yatta, won the Academy Award for best documentary feature.

Taking the stage at the Oscars, two of the film's four co-directors – an Israeli and a Palestinian – used their acceptance speeches to call for Palestinian rights and a negotiated solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

"About two months ago, I became a father, and my hope to my daughter [is] that she will not have to live the same life I am living now," said Basel Adra, a Palestinian who lives in the West Bank.

"Always feeling settler violence, home demolitions, and forceful displacement that my community, Masafer Yatta, is facing every day under the Israeli occupation.

"We call on the world to take serious action to stop the injustice and stop the ethnic cleansing of Palestinian people," he said.

His co-director, Israeli Yuval Abraham, spoke of the "atrocious destruction of Gaza and its people, which must end, the Israeli hostages, brutally taken in the crime of 7 October, which must be freed."

He also criticised Israel's "unequal" treatment of West Bank Palestinians and said US policy in the region was playing a negative role.

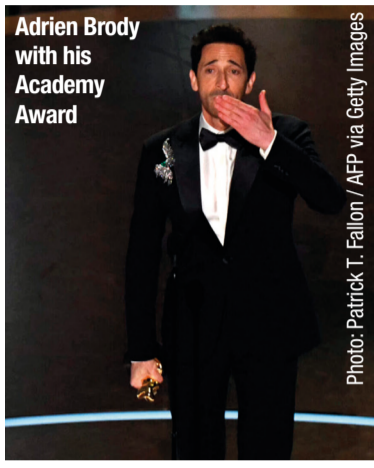
"There's a different path, a political solution, without ethnic supremacy, with national rights for both of our people," he said.

"And I have to say, as I am here, the foreign policy in this country is helping to block this path. Why? Can't you see that we are intertwined? That my people can be truly safe if Basel's people are truly free and safe? There is another way. It's not too late for life, for the living."

The Oscar win is especially significant as the film doesn't yet have a distributor, which Abraham has attributed to its contentious subject matter.

This Academy Awards, the second since Hamas's 7 October 2023 attack and the subsequent outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza, is also the second straight ceremony to feature a speech about Israel.

• All briefs supplied by JTA



Adrien Brody with his Academy Award

Photo: Patrick T. Fallon / AFP via Getty Images

After the fall – a greater 'you' emerges

Torah Thought

A sublime idea can be gleaned from the opening verse of this week's portion. To preface it, however, a few questions need to be asked.

In the entire Torah, from Moses' entry on the scene until his death, there is no portion absent his name. In most portions, his name is, of course, stated multiple times. This week is the exception. Moses' name isn't mentioned once. Why?

Furthermore, in the opening verse of the portion, Moses is instructed by G-d, "You shall connect to the Jewish people." Compared to using a person's name, the term "you" suggests a hiddenness, a concealment of the person. Moses is simultaneously shown to be concealed – "you" – while being instructed to connect to the Jewish people. Why are these together?

Finally, one commentator explains that it is in fact the opposite. That the term "you" here, is expressing a much loftier aspect of Moses, one that transcends his name. How do we understand that?

A suggested explanation. Moses had a moment, like so many do, in which darkness overwhelmed him. A crushing of the spirit, a breaking down of self, and so his name doesn't appear – he is referenced as "you". There was a loss of "name", of self, so to speak.

G-d says "you", the Moses that has had this "breakdown", that is engulfed in darkness, "connect to the people of Israel". In this "connect to" lies the depth of this council.

When one undergoes a traumatic life experience, a breakdown, a darkness of overwhelming proportion, one must reach out and connect. Enter the individual or persons (angels) that has/have been reached out to, that empathise and hold up

that person in their moment of crisis and darkness. In their "response to call" that individual is placed in a way that imitates G-d more than in any other – breathing life into another human being, holding them up, supporting and shouldering them in their time of need.

In Moses' case he was instructed to "connect to the people of Israel", to the light and energy of this great nation, and draw strength and revitalisation from her.

When one reaches out and doesn't receive a response from the person in one's dire moment, it means they aren't able, don't have sufficient compassion, strength, or capacity to respond, and one must reach out again, to another and another.

When one is hopefully lifted from that fragile and vulnerable state, a new person emerges, a greater, deeper, more

Rav Ilan Herrmann
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sensitised, truer person, thus the commentator that says the "you" which Moses is referred to here, is beyond his name. For as he connected to the light of the people and resurfaced, he reached a level much higher than even his name.

To add though, that as one reaches out, to connect and seek the strength of that G-dly pillar and individual in one's time of travail, one should from one's depths also reach out to G-d to change one's situation and role, to rise and become a pillar for another, should one be called upon.

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On the Shabbat that precedes Purim, two Torah scrolls are taken from the ark; one for the regular parsha and one for the Maftir – 'Remember what Amalek did to you'. Therefore, this Shabbat is called Shabbat Zachor (Remember). The Haftorah also deals with Amalek.

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Gift of the Givers' Bibas lie exposes Hamas support

TALI FEINBERG

Gift of the Givers (GOTG) may be one of the largest non-governmental organisations on the African continent, but in recent months it has also become an unapologetic mouthpiece for anti-Israel terrorism.

On 25 February, before the murdered Bibas family was even buried, GOTG posted a video on its social media platforms saying that Shiri Bibas was "arrested" on 7 October 2023, and blaming Israel for the deaths of her and her children, calling it the "Israeli Nazi army". This was after forensic evidence determined that 10-month-old Kfir; four-year-old Ariel; and 32-year-old Shiri were brutally murdered by Palestinian terrorists.

"This video is a grotesque distortion. This deliberate falsehood fuels antisemitic blood libels and exploits the family's suffering for political gain," says South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) spokesperson Rolene Marks. Further, Dr Imtiaz Sooliman's rhetoric "fosters division and incites hatred in South Africa," Marks says.

South African Jewish Board of Deputies National Chairperson Professor Karen Milner says the video is "despicable and shameful – a cynical attempt to whitewash Hamas's brutality. It even portrays the terrorists as somehow being charitable in 'allowing' Shiri Bibas to take her children with her. This grotesque amplification of Hamas propaganda is a chilling reflection of Dr Sooliman's true character.

"The video smacks of cheap propaganda and the antisemitic comments it has elicited [on social media] are telling," Milner says. "We question why someone who represents a charitable organisation can associate himself with Hamas."

The video shows a terrorist in a black mask speaking in Arabic, saying, "This family consists of a soldier and her children. We arrested her on 7 October. She worked as a secretary and admin in the office of the south area commander of the Gaza Brigade. She also worked out of the 8200 Unit. Upon her arrest, we allowed her to take her children out of mercy for them."

In reality, Shiri Bibas was a playschool teacher and then worked as an accountant in the office of her kibbutz, Nir Oz. An innocent civilian, she was brutally rounded up and kidnapped by Palestinian civilians. She and her children were murdered within weeks. GOTG chose rather to believe and spread the words of a terrorist than the clear and damning facts on the ground.

GOTG said on social media that the video was a "must watch", and that the "blood of the Bibas family is on the Israeli army's hands, just like the genocide on Gaza is!" adding a blood emoji. It then asked for money to support its "interventions" in "Palestine". South Africans from across the spectrum criticised the video and its bald-faced lies, expressing disgust that GOTG would post it.

"While the world recoiled in horror at Hamas's

"We question why someone who represents a charitable organisation can associate himself with Hamas."

brazen parade of murdered Israeli children, GOTG seized the moment to solicit funds, shamelessly broadcasting Hamas's own footage to depict the abduction of a young mother and her children as an 'act of mercy,'" says NGO Monitor Senior Researcher Shaan Sacks. "By disseminating Hamas's vile propaganda that justifies the illegal kidnapping of Shiri Bibas and her children from their home as 'an arrest', trivialising the severity of taking women and children hostage, GOTG reveals itself as a public relations machine exploiting human misery."

Sacks says it's "alarming" that GOTG steadfastly refuses to disclose its funding sources. "[GOTG founder] Dr Imtiaz Sooliman has openly admitted

is a Jew. Sooliman has participated in Jew-hating marches, sharing podiums alongside open Hamas, ISIS, and Hezbollah supporters, spouting conspiracy theories about how Zionists control the world. Rather than call for peace, Sooliman has repeatedly celebrated what he believes to be the inevitable obliteration of Israel. He has openly supported terrorist organisations."

Due to Sooliman's refusal to come clean about the organisation's finances, "and rather to hide behind a vitriolic and dogmatic hatred of Israel and his connection to politicians and influential figures, we cannot be sure if GOTG is merely sympathetic to terrorism or actively funding it", wrote Woode-Smith.

Marks says the SAZF "unequivocally condemns this latest outrage by GOTG, which cynically manipulates its image as a humanitarian NGO to spread Hamas propaganda. Its ongoing incitement, disinformation, and legitimisation of Hamas's atrocities expose its true agenda."

Marks notes that a growing number of South Africans recognise GOTG's role in radicalisation and destabilisation. "We call on the government, media, and civil society to scrutinise its activities and condemn its extremist ties. The SAZF stands with the victims of Hamas terrorism, and urges all people of conscience to reject GOTG's toxic agenda."

David May, senior research analyst at The Foundation for Defense of Democracies in the United States, says, "It's bizarre for a supposed human rights organisation to share this pro-Hamas propaganda. Some of this mystery can be explained by GOTG's alleged membership in a Hamas funding network. The United States sanctioned the charity umbrella group Union of Good in 2008 for funding Hamas. The union's website in the early 2000s listed GOTG as a South African-based member."

He thinks the South African government's anti-Israel hostility could also help explain why GOTG felt comfortable sharing the video. "October 7 was a 'mask off' moment for many, including Sooliman and GOGT," says May. "The humanitarian organisation and its founder have been increasingly bold in their support of antisemitism and pro-Hamas propaganda. And why shouldn't they, when their government serves as Hamas's lawyer at the International Court of Justice and accuses Israel – the victim of genocidal acts – of being the perpetrator?"

"As it stands, Sooliman's rhetoric and questionable connections paint a dark picture," writes Woode-Smith. "One in which a charity organisation has been used to fund terror. And possibly, even paid for some of the bullets fired on 7 October 2023. The bullets that started this whole violent affair, in which Hamas and its allies are responsible for every death that followed."

to flouting funding restrictions and oversight mechanisms," he says. "In light of its dissemination of Hamas propaganda, it's imperative to investigate GOTG, its staff, and affiliates for potential ties to terrorism. Moreover, South African corporations partnering with GOTG must be held accountable for their association with this organisation."

A range of voices in South Africa and abroad continue to question Sooliman's motivations. In a *BizNews* article published on 10 January 2024, titled "Sooliman must come clean", political analyst Nicholas Woode-Smith says, "Sooliman has cultivated a reputation as a humanitarian who cares for his fellow man. Unless, of course, that man



Screenshot from the video posted by Gift of the Givers on social media about the Bibas family

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Left and right – strange bedfellows when it comes to Jews

STEVEN GRUZD



OPINION

As the leadership of the Western world appears to be moving right with electoral gains for right-wing parties in Europe and beyond, it's as much of an indicator of growing antisemitism as it would be if left-wing governments were on the rise. Jews remain a convenient scapegoat for both extremes.

At the end of February 2025, to the shock of many, the right-wing Alternative for Germany (AFD) won more than 10 million votes, the second highest number in Germany's election. This result gave the party 20% of the seats in the Bundestag Germany's Parliament. This avowedly anti-immigration party evokes toxic German ultranationalism, including antisemitic ideas, with echoes of the Nazis.

There have also been gains for right-of-

centre parties that oppose immigration in recent elections in France, Italy, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, among others, even though such parties are frequently frozen out of ruling coalitions. Should we therefore expect a rise in antisemitic incidents, with the oldest hatred traditionally synonymous with the far right? Antisemitism levels are already higher than normal the world over in reaction to Israel's war against Hamas, emanating more from those on the



The right-wing party Alternative for Germany (AFD) has shown significant growth in Germany

political left in the current circumstances. And how do we explain that, despite their often-antisemitic rhetoric and policies, parties on the political right are often pro-Israel? They

generally support the right-wing coalition government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

With a right-of-centre Republican-dominated Congress, albeit by just a few seats, and Donald Trump back in the White House, will this be good for Jews and for Israel? Initial indications are that Washington is squarely behind the hard choices Jerusalem will have to make in the coming months. These will deal with the release of the remaining Israeli hostages in Gaza and whether negotiations will proceed to the second phase, or whether Israel will resume its attacks on Hamas. Whether Trump is able to stop harassment of Jewish students on American campuses, vandalism of synagogues, vile slogans at pro-Palestinian rallies, and other antisemitic actions remains

to be seen.

Sometimes, political parties on the far left and the far right of the political spectrum have more in common in their tactics and policies than they do with parties in the centre, including on antisemitic and Islamophobic speech and action. Hate can make for strange bedfellows.

David Saks, who has been responsible for tracking antisemitism at the South African Jewish Board of Deputies for decades said, "It's important to distinguish between being 'on the right' or 'right leaning', which need not be synonymous with being anti-democratic or racist, and ultra-right, extremist movements and/or ideologies. The first largely eschew antisemitism – at least officially – while almost invariably, it's a core component of the world view of the second. While right-wing hardliners also sometimes combine standard antisemitic invective with anti-Israel rants, this is despite the fact that it puts them in the same camp as the anti-Western, postcolonial left, which it regards as the inveterate enemy of the white races."

Milton Shain, emeritus professor of history at the University of Cape Town, said, "The late George Mosse, a renowned scholar of fascism and Nazism, always told me that the heart is on the left. Spending his early years in Nazi Germany, Mosse knew all about right-wing (in his case Nazi) antisemitism. But we need to recognise that the 'left' has also not been immune to Jew-hatred. It has oft-times raised the 'Jewish Question' in ugly ways."

"Arguably this began in earnest with Karl Marx, himself a Jew," Shain said. "Subsequently, many prominent left-wing intellectuals have opined in conspiratorial terms about 'the Jew' and the 'Jewish Question'. Consider the writings of JA Hobson and his contention that specifically Jewish cosmopolitan financiers initiated the Anglo-Boer War. Conspiratorial left-wing anti-Jewish thinking persisted long after Hobson, especially in Russia and later, the Soviet Union. By most accounts, Joseph Stalin – at least in his last years – was a Jew hater. On the other hand, it would be foolish to ignore the right and its history of Jew-hatred. It was central to Nazism.

"In more recent decades, right-wing populism has spawned many Jew-haters. Holocaust denial is only one dimension of warped and conspiratorial thinking. Attacks on George Soros and the period of Jörg Haider in Austria typify the survival of such thinking, which has been grafted to an Islamophobia which echoes the discourse employed against Jewish immigration in the late nineteenth century. Interestingly, such xenophobia has dampened but not removed antisemitism on the far right and has even led to support for Israel.

"It would, however, be myopic to assume that far-right populists are cleansed of Jew-hatred. It would similarly be naïve to believe that antisemitism plays no part in left-wing anti-Zionism. For many so-called progressives this obsession is a hygienic form of Jew-hatred. Jeremy Corbyn is a case study. But the former Labour leader has support in many quarters. In inexplicable ways, many on the left support Hamas, an anti-modern and misogynistic death cult that has no place in the universalist and meliorative project that has informed the best of the leftist thought for the past two centuries."

As history has tragically shown, when things go wrong in a country, blame is heaped on its Jewish citizens from both left and right. Jews become apparently responsible for all the ills of society, no matter where the hate comes from.

• Steven Gruzd is a political analyst in Johannesburg. He writes in his personal capacity.

UN agency's bias skews data, damages Israel's reputation

BARRY SHAW



OPINION

The United Nations (UN) Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) plays a significant role in documenting humanitarian crises worldwide. However, its Israeli office has exhibited systematic bias, methodological inconsistencies, and flawed data collection methods, causing enormous damage to Israel's reputation.

COGAT (Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories), Israel's official humanitarian aid organisation, has drafted a report examining OCHA's reporting, its reliance on questionable sources, and its role in shaping international narratives based on distorted information with numerous egregious cases in Gaza.

According to UN guidelines, OCHA, as an agency operating on its behalf, must adhere to the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, humanity, and independence. This obligation is anchored in UN General Assembly resolutions.

The organisation defines these principles and explains that, "Humanitarian actors must not take sides in hostilities or engage in controversies of a political, racial, religious, or ideological nature," as well as refrain from "making distinctions based on nationality, race, gender, religious beliefs, class, or political opinions".

However, an examination of OCHA's reporting practices in general and during the conflict in Gaza since the Hamas-induced war of 7 October, when Israel was forced to react to Palestinian barbaric attacks against Israeli citizens keeping them hostage and refusing to return them, clearly reveals a significant bias in the organisation's reports in favour of the Palestinian side.

Many diplomatic and media entities look on the UN's OCHA as the authoritative source of information on the reality of the Gaza Strip and Judea and Samaria. However, they are unaware of the degree to which OCHA's reports are one-sided and selective.

OCHA hasn't, for example, monitored nor reported the systematic and deadly violence by Palestinians against Israeli civilians nor the numerous violations by Palestinian armed groups against Palestinians such as the use of human shields, abuse of civilian facilities, and obstruction of humanitarian assistance in Gaza by Palestinian Hamas.

To date, OCHA hasn't reported on the existence of a single Hamas tunnel used for terrorism or any launch of rockets from the densely populated area in Gaza, many of them short-falling and killing the local population, at least one of which hit a hospital killing and injuring at least 400 people, according to the Gaza Ministry of Health, aka the Hamas terror organisation.

All these acts are self-evident war crimes.

In contrast, OCHA exclusively reports on actions by Israel, all of which are couched in negative terms as if there were no mitigating factors.

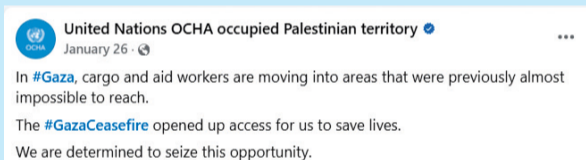
The reliance on sources with questionable credibility further erodes the organisation's impartiality. OCHA frequently cites information without specifying its source or underlying methodology, often referring to them as unspecified "UN assessments".

This practice was particularly evident in its weekly (previously daily) reports on Gaza and the West Bank, where reports have repeatedly relied on information from Hamas-controlled institutions such as the Gaza Ministry of Health

and the Government Media Office, again Hamas, without proper verification.

Notably, after 7 October 2023, OCHA initially acknowledged Hamas as the source of casualty figures but later removed these attributions, reinstating them only after Israeli intervention.

Additionally, when reporting on conflicts around the world, OCHA doesn't consider any other entity in conflict zones reliable enough to cite regularly for casualty figures in its reports, for example in Ukraine, Sudan, Yemen, etc. However, Hamas is its source of information on a regular basis. In doing so, OCHA gives the terror organisation credibility.



When quoting casualty figures, OCHA doesn't clearly state that these figures include members of armed groups, contrary to the UN's standard practice elsewhere in the world, distinguishing between civilians and non-civilians in casualty reports. In the case of Gaza, OCHA has created the misleading impression that the figures refer to civilians only.

The casualty numbers adopted by OCHA also don't account for natural deaths and deaths by accident or as a result of crimes and violence inside the Gaza Strip such as violence between clans and other criminal violence, of which there is much.

OCHA adopted Hamas sources as credible during the war, giving credibility to the Gaza Ministry of Health. Much of the Western media fed off its inaccurate information. The result was that Israel was constantly cast in a bad light, leaving Hamas unblemished.

OCHA, therefore, has been an active partner of the Hamas psychological warfare and disinformation campaign against Israel.

OCHA tracks only humanitarian goods entering Gaza by the UN and partial information on other INGOs (international nongovernmental organisations), excluding private-sector aid.

This leads to a skewed picture of the full amount of aid that entered the Gaza Strip throughout the war, showcasing significantly lower amounts than actually entered Gaza.

OCHA's counting methods also ignored security-screened goods that were introduced into the Gaza Strip but left

uncollected.

Egregiously, OCHA also doesn't acknowledge the presence of another, more extensive, set of data managed by COGAT, Israel's official humanitarian aid organisation, preferring to use Hamas-run ministries extensively as information sources.

This selective reporting and lack of transparency gave governments, officials, and the media, which relied on OCHA's data, a distorted picture of the overall humanitarian situation and the necessary actions to address it.

OCHA's reports also contain misleading food insecurity projections.

In weekly reports after the hostage-release deal began, OCHA still claimed that 91% of Gaza's population faced extreme food insecurity. This was based on outdated IPC (integrated food security phase classification) estimates from November 2024, and ignored the fact that hundreds more trucks of food entered Gaza daily.

These reports failed to incorporate food aid deliveries post-ceasefire despite acknowledging the ceasefire itself.

The Israeli government challenged the report's credibility, yet OCHA continued to cite its incorrect figures, fuelling misleading famine narratives that misrepresented the situation on the ground and badly tarnished Israel.

OCHA is also guilty of data washing.

Unverified statistics and information are often reported by OCHA without quoting a source or a verification but often with an appropriate disclaimer. Other UN organisations, international organisations, and governments quote OCHA reports, using OCHA as its source. The original disclaimers disappear when other entities quote OCHA's reports and are quoted as verified information by the UN.

An example was the claim that Gaza has the "largest population of child amputees in modern history" a lie that has been widely circulated by international organisations based on flawed extrapolations. This misrepresentation further misguides global discourse on the conflict, putting pressure on the government of Israel without any justification.

Despite extensive documentation of Hamas's atrocities on 7 October, OCHA has yet to publish a single report detailing these war crimes. The suffering endured by Israeli society, including rocket attacks, extensive displacement, and trauma, let alone the murder, torture, rape, and hostage taking, is barely mentioned, if at all.

This selective emphasis creates an imbalance that compromises OCHA's humanitarian principles of neutrality and independence.

In light of OCHA's mistakes and omissions, it has an obligation to take immediate corrective measures and actions to demonstrate its supposed commitment to reliable, credible, and verified information including correcting incorrect information, inaccurate data, and unsubstantiated claims in its reports since 7 October 2023.

It must clearly state that reported fatalities and injuries include the large numbers of members of armed groups and individuals involved in violent attacks against Israelis.

Addressing these issues is critical to ensure that OCHA's humanitarian efforts genuinely serve all affected populations honestly and without bias.

• Barry Shaw is international public diplomacy associate at the Israel Institute for Strategic Studies.

Aliya increases, with most *olim* under 40

LEE TANKLE

Aliya from South Africa is on the increase but most of those leaving are young adults under the age of 40.

Of the 24 South African *olim* who made aliya in January 2025, 17 were under the age of 40, said Daniela Shapira, aliya and *klita* advisor from Telfed. "There were two pensioners and one family of four, and the rest were all young people," she said.

And in terms of those making enquiries about making aliya, half of those who get in touch with Sarah Berman, pre-aliya advisor from Telfed, are under 40.

"We've got young adults coming, you know, by age 18 to 23, young couples, young families as well," said Berman. "They want to be a part of Israel. They want to be a part of what's going on there."

"I was pleasantly surprised that even the war didn't diminish the numbers of South Africans making aliya, but encouraged them to come," Shapira said.

Married couple Josh and Shira Marks, 28 and 26 years old respectively, started their aliya process in 2022, well before the war started, but there were a few things they wanted to sort out in South Africa before they left for Israel such as getting married. Shira said that by the time all the logistics were sorted out and they were ready to leave, Israel was in the middle of the war.

"We decided that the war wasn't going to stop us," she said. "If we didn't make aliya at that point, then it



Sarah Shevel

would have kept getting pushed backwards. We weren't sure it would have happened."

Similarly, 23-year-old Sarah Shevel started the aliya process well before

the war started because it had been a dream of hers since she was 17. So, when war broke out in October 2023, she wasn't going to let it stop her.

"It's never easy moving to a place on your own, especially with a new language. Navigating the country has been challenging, but I've managed," she said.

Shapira said there were different paths for a young *oleh* to take depending on age, circumstances, status, and preference.

For instance, many youngsters from the ages of 18 to 23 will go on kibbutz ulpan programmes, in which youngsters in their 20s and even 30s start with an ulpan programme for a few months, then focus on education and work opportunities.

Shapira said she visited a kibbutz ulpan in the north of Israel which last year had 12 South Africans. This is already an increase on previous years, when there were between four and six South Africans. However, this year, there are 23 young South Africans at that same kibbutz.

Last year, when Shapira went to visit the Ulpan Etzion campus in Jerusalem, there were five South African *olim*. However, when she visited the campus again in January this year, there were 11 South Africans – marking a 120% increase on the previous year.

Marc Labe, 27, decided to make aliya in April 2024, and is completing his ulpan programme. Despite the war, Labe believed there were more opportunities for him in Israel, and thought it was the best time for him to start this new journey.

"I have friends that live in Tel Aviv and I thought it would be the best decision for me to move, even considering what was going on at that time. Perhaps it made me feel more like I should be here subconsciously."

Yael Strausz, Telfed's employment advisor, said finding a job in Israel depended on the profession, but no matter which field these young *olim* go into, they come in with a lot of relevant experience.

"Youngsters from South Africa are finding work because of their native English, so many can find a way

into the business side of the market," said Strausz.

There is now a programme run by the Israeli government that allows people such as those in the medical profession, teachers, engineers, and architects to start the licensing process before they arrive, so that they can start working as soon as possible.

Said Labe, "The state is also really helpful with welcoming new *olim*. The benefits you get make it a much softer landing."

For Shira, as a physiotherapist, the hardest part of the aliya journey has



Josh and Shira Marks

been getting certified to practice in Israel. "But once that was done, luckily, I can say that there is a great need for physios in the country."

Strausz said many in Israel want South African *olim* to work for them because of the South African work ethic.

"South Africans come skilled, ready to work, and not to play around," said Strausz, "This is sought after in Israel."

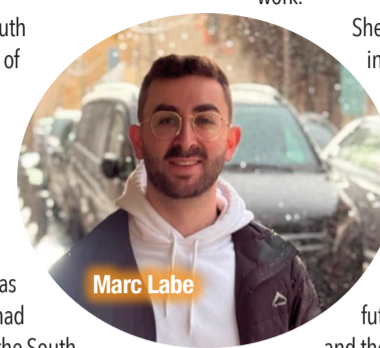
She described a situation where someone big in the business world in Israel asked for another South African as his assistant as his previous assistant had been South African and he liked how the South African *olim* work.

"South Africans are hard workers and well qualified," said Strausz, "So there's no problem with them finding work."

Shevel said she was able to find a job in the high-tech sector within six months of landing in Israel.

Similarly, Josh, as an engineer, was able to find work at a renewable energy company in Netanya after five months of perseverance.

"A lot of youngsters see their future here and better opportunities, and they take the brave decision to come on their own," Shapira said.



Marc Labe

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With honour and kindness

Within the past week, I found myself in need of urgent help. I became a crime victim, but fortunately, nobody was physically harmed.

The person who came to our rescue was a Muslim woman in my neighbourhood. She opened her home and did all that she possibly could to help, including calling CAP, the police, and providing video proof of the criminals' vehicle.

Her WhatsApp photograph has a Palestinian flag covering the map of Israel, indicative of someone who believes that from the river to the sea, Israel should belong to Palestinians. However, she's a kind and caring woman who saw past any differences between us to help us.

She's aware that I'm Jewish and what I do for a living. We have never discussed the Middle East, nor are we likely to because we aren't friends, we are neighbours. The point is, she's a good person and sees the humanity in my family and me.

While I have many neighbours from all walks of life, she was the one who stepped up to help without any agenda other than the kindness of her heart.

When we scroll through social media, we see the hatefulness spewing from people we know – and some we don't – about Israel, the war in Gaza, and Jews in general.

There's no doubt that what is happening between Israel and the Palestinians is emotionally charged for us, as Jews and Muslims, because it's happening to our people. So, it's understandable that Muslim South Africans are naturally going to stand by Palestinians, and Jews are going to stand by the Jewish state. I'm not talking about the misinformation and lies perpetuated by the media. I'm talking about the hatred and ugliness festering on social media that spills out into our lives here on the southern tip of Africa.

The name calling and apparent hatred is absolutely unnecessary when trying to make a point, explain a situation, or make it clear why someone is incorrect in their assumptions.

But we don't have to make the hatred that abounds on social media and in the Middle East something that makes us hate each other in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, or anywhere in South Africa.

Like my neighbour, we really need to see the humanity in each other and, while we are entitled to our views and to take a stand, we don't need to set out to harm each other.

There is enough hatred and anger in the world. It's time to recognise each other as people. We aren't enemies. We are fellow South Africans.

There are a fair number of people in this country, visible on social media, who want you to believe that we cannot live together in peace here. They make this known in their ugly attacks on Jews.

They even carry posters to protests calling for the arrest of random Jews, endangering them by putting their names and faces on placards. And they call for South African Jews to be forced out of the country. Hatred doesn't solve anything, especially not 7 000 kilometres away from the war.

The reaction from my neighbour this week was such a breath of fresh air in a pollution factory of hatefulness.

In the past month, I have experienced and witnessed so much animosity and vengefulness that doesn't and hasn't helped a single person.

I have experienced being "thrown under the bus" by someone I held in the highest esteem for a quick response he didn't like. Rather than call me and discuss it, like I hope I would have done with him, he took a public pot shot at me. It still hurts, and it was a clear wake-up call about trust. Suffice to say, it was unnecessary and harmful. Being kind instead of being destructive makes a huge difference.

Yes, emotions are heightened. Times are tough, and the conflict in the Middle East has people taking sides. Terrible things are happening in the world to our people. This is all true. However, showing kindness rather than hatred is so much more meaningful and likely to get us places.

Listening to each other rather than trying to destroy each other is so much more beneficial. I understand that stress levels are high and we all have strong opinions. Just mention the name "Donald Trump", and you might start a war between friends as there are so many different views on the United States president's way of ruling.

For most of us, it's traumatic to read all the horrible misinformation about Jews and about Israel out there. It's unpleasant and quite frightening to witness antisemitism like we have never seen before in most of our lifetimes. It isn't easy.

But hitting back with more hatred and animosity doesn't help. It fuels the fire. Actually, on Tuesday night, 4 March, when Israeli Wonder Woman star Gal Gadot spoke at the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) summit, she quoted her grandfather, saying, "You don't win anything with anger and hate." I couldn't have said it better than Gadot's Holocaust-surviving grandfather.

Gadot received the International Leadership Award from ADL at the "Never is Now" summit in New York. And though for some, it's easier not to mention being Jewish or how you support the state of Israel, Gadot makes it clear that there's no room for that.

"This is a time when many of us in the Jewish community have had to find our voice and confront the hatred against us even if it's extremely uncomfortable," she said. "However much you tried to avoid it before, even if speaking up wasn't really your thing, none of us can ignore the explosion of Jew-hatred around the world anymore."

So while I do see the humanity in all my neighbours and fellow South Africans and believe they have the right to their opinions, I'm not going to be quiet about what I believe to be right and wrong. However, I will voice my opinions with honour, respect, and kindness.

You see, my name is Peta, and I am Jewish.



Israel needs better tactics to counter misinformation minefield

OPINION

PAULA SLIER



Fake news costs Israel in blood, money, and allies. With between 20% to 30% of shared content about the current Gaza war estimated to be fake, it's no surprise that the 2024 World Economic Forum's risk report says misinformation and disinformation are the number one threat facing the world, ahead of extreme weather and conflicts.

As much as a quarter of news from Gaza is said to be distorted. "Pollywood" – a term blending "Palestine" and "Hollywood" – has become a playbook. Scenes are staged to look like Israeli atrocities – crying children, bloodied streets – and then flooded onto social media to tug at emotions. Old footage is also repurposed from unrelated events to fit the current narrative about Gaza. Because there's no institutionalised media in Gaza, the coverage is chaotic and often crowd-sourced from activists. The game is dirty, and the goal is sympathy.

The situation is compounded by the fact that there is no foreign or independent media in Gaza and local journalists all work for Hamas-owned outlets. Israel is partly to blame in this double-edged sword as it doesn't allow foreign media into the Gaza Strip from Israel, arguing it's an active combat zone, with airstrikes, Hamas rocket fire, and ground invasions. The Supreme Court upheld the ban in January 2025, agreeing that if foreign journalists were left to roam around independently inside Gaza, they could compromise Israeli troop movements and/or intelligence. There is also the fear that media crews could inadvertently film sensitive positions or be taken hostage by Hamas. But critics argue that this is a way for Israel to control the narrative. It's easier to counter or influence Hamas-sourced material as "it's all biased anyway" than if the material originated from a reputable foreign network. The bottom line is that Israel doesn't trust foreign media and believes it to be pro-Palestinian with the goal of amplifying civilian suffering over military context.

As a result, most of the world's media is left to rely on unverified stories by Hamas journalists and the Hamas-controlled Gaza Healthy Ministry known to inflate figures and not differentiate between fighters and civilians.

By comparison, the Israeli government isn't guilt-free. It has been accused of under-reporting civilian Gaza deaths, employing state-funded bots, and focusing on "Pollywood" so that it can sidestep scrutiny. But Jerusalem has more money and well-tuned government ministries than Gaza to do its "hasbara" (explaining). So why then is Israel's public relations (PR) so bad? A 2024 Pew Research Center Survey found that 58% of Americans view Israel unfavourably compared to 43% pre-2023. A 2023 YouGov poll found that 60% of British and German people side more with the Palestinians.

Israel's foreign affairs and diaspora affairs departments and the prime minister's office don't have a unified message or command. More often than not, they are reactive,

assuming that if Israel clarifies its position, audiences will get it. Resources are also thin. Israel increased its *hasbara* budget from \$8.6 million to \$130 million only in 2024. Contrast this with Al Jazeera's \$500 million budget and the United States' \$2 billion budget for its digital arm.

Another reason for the country's bad PR is that "bad policies" – despite the spin – cannot be presented as "good" in the media. The "we are the victim" script that Israeli representatives still push no longer holds water for most people.

Now add Artificial intelligence (AI) to the mix, and the game changes dramatically when it comes to fake news. AI is able to pump out thousands of posts, articles, and videos daily. An AI misinformation campaign last year reached 10 million users on X in less than 48 hours before being detected. Social media platforms thrive on speed, scale, and engagement so they are the perfect breeding ground for AI-powered fakes.

AI also micro-targets, generating fake news in local languages to niche communities with tailored lies. People are more likely to believe news that concurs with their "echo chamber", which is part of the reason audiences must challenge themselves and not only access news they agree with. AI-generated misinformation can deceive 90% of an audience if it matches their biases.

So what can one do? Check the source of the content. Try to access raw material, and as far as possible, sources one trusts like the Israel Defense Forces, Israeli officials, and Western outlets. Look for facts, not feelings. Check other media – if a story is only on one side, it's



suspect. Check the timing – the first reports in war are often wrong. Use tools like "reverse image search" to spot recycled pictures. Lastly, ask yourself who gains from this piece of news. The Palestinians want sympathy. Israel wants justification for its strikes.

Fake news counts on people hitting "share" without thinking twice. This happens when we are emotionally charged. Outrage, fear, anger, scepticism, and novelty thrive on social platforms. Be careful. Be armed. Fake news travels 70% faster than truth, and when retractions are made, they reach 10 times fewer people than the original fake post. At the end of the day, it's increasingly going to be up to us to navigate our way through this minefield of what's true and what's fake.

• Paula Slier is the founder and chief executive of Newshound Media International and former Middle East and Africa bureau chief for RT.

Shabbat Shalom!
Peta Krost
Editor

Art of channelling sibling rivalry into positive relationships

LEE TANKLE

Though sibling rivalry may be hard for parents to witness, it's an unavoidable and important part of childhood development, clinical psychologist Ruth Ancer told an audience at a Chevrah Kadisha talk on 26 February.

Sibling rivalry is a vehicle through which children can learn to negotiate, compromise, assert their needs, and develop social skills, Ancer said, and it changes over time.

"It's as fluid as people," she said. "Siblings grow and their lives diverge, the intensity of rivalry often ebbs, and there are more mature ways of engaging with each other, but the echoes of those early competitions can linger and they influence how we view ourselves."

Though sibling rivalry can be a good thing, "when it escalates beyond healthy competition, it leads to lower self-esteem, feelings of inadequacy, and makes it hard for a child to find their own identity", she said.

Ancer said that in many families, perceived roles are either consciously or unconsciously given to the children, such as "the responsible one"; "the troublemaker"; "the clever one"; and "the shy one". These often have an impact not only on how the children act during childhood and adolescence, but often follow them into adulthood and can have long-lasting effects.

Though "we don't want to give our children labels that make them feel boxed in", we can focus on the things they do well as opposed to their general behaviour, Ancer said, pointing out that it's important to let your "good children" know that they don't always have to be angelic.

She said one of her patients was labelled "the perfect child" who received all the academic awards and never failed anything in her life until she failed her learner's licence test at 17 years old. The young woman never went back to get her learner's licence because she was scarred from the fact that she failed one time and thus wasn't "the perfect child" anymore.

"She thinks her parents were disappointed in her. And I keep saying, 'So many people fail their learner's licence test. Your parents aren't disappointed in you. They'd be disappointed in you if you were a terrible person and you made decisions that affected hundreds of people's lives negatively. They're not disappointed in you because three years ago, you got two things wrong in your learner's licence test.' But that's how hard it's been because she's internalised it," Ancer said.

Ancer said the sibling dynamic is the "blueprint for relationships". This means that if someone has a highly competitive relationship with their siblings, it might be replicated when they are with their friends or even work colleagues.

Furthermore, Ancer said, often, a child



Ruth Ancer at the Chevrah Kadisha talk

will act out when a new sibling is brought into the fold. "Sibling rivalry is a predictable, normal, and healthy response to the birth of a new baby because it's a perceived threat to the parent-child relationship."

Even before her son was born, Ancer said, her daughter, who was two years old at the time, would suggest that "he get his own mommy and daddy because I don't want to share".

Similarly, she said, sibling rivalry teaches children how to handle conflict and negotiate as siblings often bicker over mundane things and have to learn how to navigate those challenges.

Parents should teach their children about how to handle "hot" emotions, Ancer said. "It's okay for children sometimes to lose their tempers, but it's important that they know how to calm down and that they don't hurt

each other in the process."

Ancer urged parents to avoid making comparisons between their children because it can create resentment.

"It's so easy just to say, 'Why can't you clean your room like [your other child]?' But you create resentment when you compare children," she said.

However, Ancer doesn't advocate for everything being equal. "You can try and make things fair, but life isn't fair," she said. "If we try and make things fair all the time, children will never learn resilience, they'll never learn disappointment, they'll have unrealistic expectations. So, I wouldn't just say, 'Life isn't fair.' I'd say, 'Things aren't always fair. I know that makes you upset, but I can't always make things fair.'"

Ancer said that while parents should reinforce good behaviour, they should also try to be the best possible role models for their children. "It's so easy to tell children what to do, but they learn much more from what you do," she said, "When you've lost your temper or something like that, it's important to be able to say to your children, 'I'm sorry, I was feeling tired and I didn't use my calm voice, so I'm sorry for the way I reacted.' From that they can learn that it's also okay to say sorry."

The sibling dynamic can be difficult, Ancer said, and no two families are the same. "Ultimately, the journey through sibling rivalry isn't just about resolving conflicts, but about forging bonds that withstand the trials of love, enriching the family tapestry of patterns of love, respect, and enduring companionship."

Propaganda-averse Israel losing psychological war

LULA PENCHARZ

There are two types of war being fought in the Middle East – a physical and a psychological war – but only one side is fighting and winning the latter war, says international psychological warfare expert Ron Schleifer.

Schleifer said the psychological war was dominated by Hamas and Israel's enemies, and if he was to "draw a cartoon of Hamas", he "would draw a puppet master" because it was using media and politicians to do its bidding.

Schleifer, a senior lecturer at Ariel University in Israel, is in South Africa at the moment on a speaking tour. He told the SA Jewish Report that this type of warfare, which cleverly incorporates propaganda, is used to "persuade the enemy that he has no chance". Psychological warfare is a major tool in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, he said.

Schleifer said Hamas had managed to entrench an "extreme anxiety deep down in the Israeli psyche", which had fuelled doubt and fear after the "large-scale pogrom" on 7 October. Israeli citizens, he said, now question the government, security, and democracy. He believes Hamas managed to create doubt in Israeli society and "save face" and "protect" itself in the international arena through a "long campaign of five or six decades" of sharing a certain truth with the world through propaganda techniques.

Schleifer recalls the 2006 kidnapping of soldier Gilad Shalit and the anguish it caused in Israeli society. "This showed Israel in a bad light to target audiences – the home front; the Arab world; and the neutrals, America and Europe. How come the mighty Mossad and Shin Bet, not to mention high-tech, couldn't trace one soldier 45 minutes away from Tel Aviv?" He commented on the doubt that grew among Israeli society and the international world about the capabilities of Israel and if the allocation of funding was justifiable without deliverables. "This is the groundwork for what we see now," he said.

"In the Arab world, it goes without saying that there is a ministry of propaganda," Schleifer said. "In [Israel],



Photo: screenshot

Psychological warfare expert Ron Schleifer

it was only recently installed, and called the ministry of strategic affairs or diaspora relations."

Schleifer describes Israel's aversion to propaganda by stating, "If you ask an Israeli chief of staff what's more important, another F35 or a proper propaganda wing at the same cost, they will always have the same answer, another F35."

Israel is uncomfortable with the idea of propaganda, he said, and hasn't invested effectively in the psychological war at hand. Hamas, on the other hand, is successful in its psychological warfare techniques and persuasion of the media and international world.

Psychological warfare is far more accessible today with increased technology and social media presence. "Why not use it for persuasion?" Schleifer asks. Hamas and Arab nations, he said, have a stronghold over propaganda and psychological techniques, understanding how to use the media to achieve their goals. Hamas "persuades journalists who in turn persuade readers" to support Hamas's anti-Zionist agenda.

"Propaganda isn't turning white into black, and vice versa. It strengthens shades which feeds your interest," said Schleifer. To understand the exploitation of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, he offers the explanation of the "Palestinians and Soviet puppet masters investing

Continued on page 11

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LETS EMBRACE THE FESTIVE SPIRIT OF PURIM TOGETHER!

In-person interaction antidote to loneliness



PAUL BACHER

OPINION

Loneliness is a global epidemic. It's often called the silent killer, and for good reason. Studies have repeatedly shown that chronic loneliness can be as detrimental to health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. The physiological and psychological impacts of this modern-day plague are staggering, with loneliness linked to heart disease, cognitive decline, depression, and even early mortality. It's not just an emotional state but a profound public health crisis, affecting millions across all ages and demographics.



Attendees at a local meetup

In a world increasingly connected through technology, the paradox of loneliness has only grown. Platforms like Facebook and Instagram, designed to bring us closer together, often exacerbate the sense of isolation many feel. Despite the illusion of constant connectivity, meaningful relationships are being replaced with superficial interactions, leaving an ever-expanding void.

This isn't just a theory; the data is unequivocal. A study by Brigham Young University revealed that loneliness increases the risk of premature death by 26%. In the United Kingdom, more than two million older adults report feeling persistently lonely, prompting the government to appoint a minister for loneliness. Meanwhile, in the United States, nearly half of all adults admit to feeling lonely. The COVID-19 pandemic only worsened this crisis, forcing individuals into isolation and magnifying the issue on a global scale.

Amid this crisis, Wholesome Spaces was born. Like many transformative ideas, it emerged from personal adversity. Following my divorce in 2021, I found myself grappling with profound loneliness. My tightly knit social circle – once filled with couples and families – dissipated as I navigated the uncharted waters of life as a single, mature adult. The pain was palpable, but it also sparked an idea: what if I could channel my darkness into light for others? Through conversations and research, I discovered an untapped universe of mature singles in similar circumstances – isolated, yearning for connection, often with no sense of community, and unsure where to begin. And so, Wholesome Spaces was founded with a singular goal: to bring together people with wholesome values and a willingness to engage in meaningful, in-person interactions.

What began in Johannesburg as a small group of 13 individuals on a weekend retreat at the Vaal River has since blossomed into a thriving community.

This experience led me to deep dive into the science behind human connection. Psychologists emphasise that belonging and community aren't luxuries, they are necessities. Research published in the *Journal of Health Psychology* confirms that social connections boost resilience, lower stress, and even improve physical health. Loneliness, on the other hand, can lead to increased inflammation in the body, suppressed immune function, and a greater risk of developing chronic illnesses.

So what can we do to combat this? Wholesome Spaces offers more than just activities; it provides a lifeline. Participants often share how their involvement has reignited a sense of purpose and belonging. One member described it as "a new family" that brought hope after the loss of a spouse. Another credited the initiative with helping to rebuild self-esteem and joy after years of isolation. These stories reflect a larger truth: connection is the antidote to loneliness. As highlighted in two recent *Time* magazine articles, peer support and community-based initiatives can have a profound impact on mental health. While digital tools have their place, there's no substitute for in-person interactions that foster genuine, heartfelt relationships.

Practical solutions for a connected life:

1. Prioritise in-person interactions

While digital tools can help facilitate connection, they cannot replace the value of face-to-face engagement.

Communities that encourage regular meetups, cultural events, and small group gatherings have shown significantly lower levels of loneliness.

2. Create peer-led support networks

According to a *Time* magazine article titled "The power of the peer", individuals who participate in peer support groups experience higher levels of well-being. Unlike traditional therapeutic interventions, these groups offer a sense of belonging and shared understanding that can be deeply transformative. It argues that though peer supporters may lack the clinical training of mental health professionals, their lived experiences foster empathy, connection, and understanding that often resonates deeply with those they help, tapping into the strength of shared humanity, proving that genuine connections can catalyse healing, resilience, and a renewed sense of belonging, even in the face of profound loneliness.

3. Build authentic relationships through vulnerability

In "Let's embrace vulnerability in dating", *Time* magazine emphasises the importance of showing authenticity and vulnerability to foster meaningful relationships. In a world that often rewards curated perfection, learning to embrace our imperfections and share our true selves can lead to more meaningful relationships. It debunks the myth that personal struggles make individuals less desirable, instead framing openness as a strength that builds trust and connection. By creating a safe space where vulnerability is welcomed, initiatives like Wholesome Spaces not only combat loneliness but help members rediscover their self-worth and establish meaningful relationships, romantic or otherwise.

4. Rethink how we define community

For many, the idea of community is still rooted in religious or family structures. While these remain

important, modern community-building must adapt to new lifestyles. Whether through interest-based groups, social clubs, or intentional living arrangements, finding ways to create genuine connections outside traditional structures can be life-changing.

The loneliness epidemic isn't confined to any one demographic or geography. Governments and health institutions are recognising that loneliness isn't just a social issue, it's a public health priority. Japan has appointed a minister for isolation; the United Kingdom has developed national loneliness strategies – from community centres to digital

literacy programmes for older adults; and other countries are implementing community-based interventions to reduce social isolation. These efforts demonstrate that loneliness isn't an insurmountable problem, it's a challenge that can be addressed with creativity, empathy, and collective will.

But this isn't just a matter for policymakers. As individuals, we can take steps to make a difference. Whether through hosting a dinner for someone who lives alone, joining a local community initiative, or simply making the time to check in on friends and family, small actions can have a profound impact.

If there's one thing I've learned from my own journey, it's that no-one should have to face loneliness alone. While it may seem like an insurmountable challenge, the solution lies in rebuilding the foundations of community one connection at a time. It reminds us that, while loneliness is a universal issue, the solutions often lie within our own circles. Whether through government policies, community initiatives, or individual acts of kindness, we all have a role to play in building a more connected world.

As the Jewish community, we have long understood the power of togetherness. From the warmth of Shabbat dinners to the shared responsibility of *tzedakah*, our traditions emphasise the importance of community. We can build on this foundation, creating platforms for connection and support. Let's not underestimate the power of a simple gesture – a warm invitation, a shared meal, a meaningful conversation. Together, we can combat the loneliness epidemic and ensure that no-one has to face life's challenges alone.

• Paul Bacher is a social entrepreneur, community builder, and business leader with a passion for fostering meaningful connections, driving impact-driven initiatives, and creating spaces for personal and collective growth.

Ramaphosa's anti-Israel rant 'a red flag to a bull'

>>>Continued from page 1

Harvard trained economist, told the *SA Jewish Report* the timing and tone of Ramaphosa's article was "disastrous", like a "red flag to a raging bull".

"On Friday, we saw with Volodymyr Zelenskyy's failed visit to the White House how the Trump administration responds even to historic allies when they stand in the way of its foreign policy agenda. South Africa, which is more of a geopolitical 'frenemy' than an ally, is even more vulnerable," Kransdorff said.

"Ramaphosa seems intent on positioning South Africa as a global leader in ideological opposition to US foreign policy. But as Trump just schooled Zelenskyy, to take such a stance, you need to have the cards, and South Africa simply doesn't."

"Our economy is fragile," Kransdorff said. "High public debt, low growth, and high tax levels mean we are heavily dependent on US support. The public-health sector receives significant American aid – 17% of South Africa's HIV budget has been funded by USAID. Free trade access to the US market via AGOA also sustains hundreds of thousands of jobs in the agricultural and automotive sectors and generates crucial foreign revenue for our economy. The US is our second-largest export market."

"The US has already responded by cutting PEPFAR funding. I fear AGOA will be next. At the extreme, if Washington perceives South Africa as actively undermining its strategic interests, financial sanctions on key individuals could become a real possibility. It's unbelievably reckless to risk wrecking the livelihoods of so many South Africans just so ANC politicians can feel important on the global stage."

Political analyst Frans Cronje warned that sanctions had taken "a great leap forward" following the *Foreign Policy* article.

Joel Pollak, a senior editor at Breitbart News and a leading contender to be the next US ambassador to South Africa, told the *SA Jewish Report* that South Africa needed to come to the table with compromises, and the *Foreign Policy* article "wasn't helpful".

"AGOA specifies that countries benefiting cannot operate in a way that is counter to US foreign policy or national security. The likelihood of AGOA's termination has increased dramatically," he warned.

"Rather than being concerned, we should be vocal about the changes needed," he said. "Amend the Expropriation Act; exempt foreign companies from black economic empowerment; and withdraw the International Court of Justice case. Tell the Palestinians that the time has come to 'suspend the armed struggle', as the ANC once did."

The president's office didn't respond to questions at the time of going to print.

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Farewell to a Johannesburg bookseller extraordinaire

TRIBUTE

KATHY MUNRO



Geoffrey Klass's life was books of every different discipline and subject matter, and his knowledge about them was encyclopaedic. So, it's no wonder that he leaves behind more than two million books in the eight-storey Collectors Treasury in Commissioners Street, Johannesburg.

Klass, an extraordinary bookseller, passed away on 27 February after a short illness.

He and his brother, Jonathan, founded Collectors Treasury, a treasure trove of books and antiques. Over five decades, the shop on the many levels of the building in which it now inhabits, has become a Johannesburg institution.

Geoff was born in 1948 to Dr Max Klass, a psychiatrist, and his wife, Maisie (née Goldberg), in Johannesburg. His grandparents, Solomon and Zeldia Klass, were Lithuanian immigrants.

Geoff attributed his love of books and book collecting to his father, Max, as books were part of the family home in Parktown West. Maisie was an avid collector of antiques.

Geoff matriculated at Parktown Boys' High School and went on to read for a BSc at the University of the Witwatersrand, graduating in 1972. His next degree was a Bachelor of Philosophy, and his interests then focused on medical history; but the academic trajectory was too narrow for his exploding mind. He was often scathing about the narrow confines of university disciplines and in that sense, his mind was untrained because he refused to concentrate on only one discipline or specialism. He was ever hungry for new knowledge.

He chose Collectors Treasury as his career in 1974 when he started it with his mother and brother at 44 Stanley Avenue, Braamfontein Werf. The shop rapidly became an emporium of second-hand antiquarian non-fiction books, matched by a medley of collectables – porcelain, glass, jewellery, and artworks.

For Geoff, every serious book mattered seriously, and he was always ready to give freely of his knowledge to his customers. He loved sharing his erudition and wide reading on editions, authors, the byways of books. He could tell you about any author in any and every field. You had only to ask, and Geoff launched into a monologue on authors, their connections and relationships, politicians, heroes, and rogues. He was like a prize racehorse in the book stakes. I absorbed the many book lessons Geoff taught. He introduced me to antique maps.

The Klass collecting appetite outgrew the first 300m² shop, and moved to the city centre in about 1979. Then in 1984, it moved again after outgrowing the premises on Rissik Street.

In 1991, the Klass family bought its own art deco building at 244 Commissioner Street, which is part of the revitalised Maboneng district. The Klass family renamed the building CTP House, and pasted up striking yellow and black signs.

The inner city, with its persistent miner-camp feel, always appealed to Geoff, and he loved that there were eight floors to fill with books and treasures. The Collectors Treasury website proudly punted that it was the "largest used and rare book shop in Africa, and in the southern hemisphere, having 2 000 000 plus items on hand".

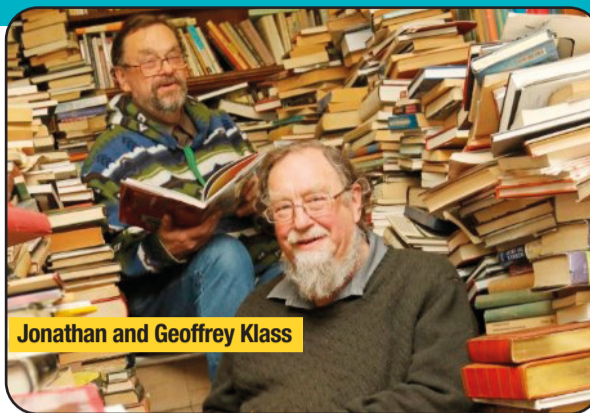
In addition to books, the stock extended to antique maps, old engravings and prints, printed ephemera, periodicals, newspapers, and photographica. The Klass brothers also curated and dealt in records, with a stock of more than 500 000 vinyl and 78 rpm discs. Beyond vinyls, they also promoted their extensive range of small antiques and collectables, with strong emphasis on the decorative arts from 1870-1970, glassware, ceramics, and porcelain. They even had boxes and boxes of old Johannesburg postcards. This treasure trove was and still is the most eccentric, quirkiest bookshop in South Africa.

Tripadvisor describes Collectors Treasury as a book lovers' paradise, saying, "Arriving at the Treasury one half expects that it's an abandoned building. When you get inside though, it's a readers paradise unlike anything I've ever seen."

Over time and the coming of the internet, a large part of the business went online but a visit to the shop was a magnet for any bibliophile. Every

book mattered. Geoff's approach was to value his books as they grew to the two million mark at international benchmarks. He saw books as the storehouses of civilisations that transcended national boundaries. He believed every book had a value and a desirable price somewhere in the world, and Geoff made that connection. It wasn't his fault that South African book collectors were thin on the ground. However, a glance at the website shows evidence of books about Rudyard Kipling; Vladimir Tretchikoff; James Joyce; Ian Fleming; Lewis Carroll; Rhodesian mining; Grand Prix racing; martial arts; and Old Dundee – an eclectic, eccentric, and fascinating mix.

The books had a life of their own. They filled shelves,



Jonathan and Geoffrey Klass

lined walls in piles, bulged from windows, and sat perilously on the steps of narrowed stairways. Books became crazy towers to a point of dangerous unstable

heights. The antique Lalique glassware had me drooling over the quality of the finely chosen pieces.

This was the only bookshop where a visit became an adventure involving some risk taking. There was that avalanche of books likely to cascade down on your head as you tried to winkle out an enticing treasure sixth from the bottom of a pile. Or you had to avoid falling down the book heavy staircases to the basement.

Geoff shook his head ruefully when a novice customer enthused, "Have you read every book in your shop?" but his only possible answer to that question was, "No, but I do know what each book is

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Israeli women lead battle for stability and recovery

ELKA COHEN

"Women are the heart of the home and the strength of society. When they rise, so does the world around them," says Adi Hendel, the clinical manager of the Family and Couples Therapy Unit at the Ashkelon Resilience Center in Israel.

In light of International Women's Day on 8 March, we spoke to some extraordinary women in Israel and beyond who have led the way during one of the most challenging times in recent history.

In Israel, women have become the backbone of their communities, offering stability and strength in visible and unseen ways. "Since the 7 October attacks, women have emerged as fierce advocates, with mothers and wives leading the charge to bring the hostages home," Hendel says.

"Israeli women are involved in every effort during this crisis," says Ayelet Shmuel, the director of the International Resilience Institute in Sderot. "Our strength lies in our unity." From organising volunteer networks to managing emergency shelters for displaced families, women have been pivotal in keeping their communities intact.

While men serve on the frontlines,

women lead on equally vital battlegrounds – in homes and communities. "In the immediate aftermath of 7 October, women formed volunteer networks, cooking for displaced families, babysitting children, and offering comfort to those in need," Hendel says. "At resilience centres across the country, therapists – mostly women – braved rocket fire to provide psychological first aid, preventing further devastation and post-traumatic stress disorder." Hendel, was among them despite having four young children at home.

In Sderot, women played an instrumental role in managing a community in shock. "Emergency teams, many led by women, took charge of running hotels for evacuees, handling everything from basic needs to trauma support," Shmuel says.

"There's something in the experience of being soldiers ourselves and then the mothers and wives of soldiers that profoundly changes the DNA of a society. It plays a big role in shaping resilience." Shmuel says, "because we understand it from both sides."

Trauma affects men and women differently. While men returning from combat struggle with reintegration, women

carry the emotional weight of holding their families together. Many Israeli mothers today face exhaustion, guilt, and an overwhelming need to remain strong for those around them.

"Women believe they must do it all – have a career, raise children, be a good wife," Hendel says. "Now, the most important lesson we're teaching them is to let go." Therapists urge women to care for themselves first, as their emotional well-being is the anchor of the household. Yet, this is easier said than done.

Both men and women carry immense guilt, asking, "Could I have done more? Should I have reacted differently? Could I have protected my children better?" These unresolved emotions often lead to burnout and depression. Mothers in war zones aren't just responsible for their children's immediate safety but for helping them to process trauma. "In therapy, many children now exhibit heightened anxiety, bed-wetting, stuttering, and school refusal," Hendel says. "In adults, we're seeing a rise in depression, addiction, and marital conflict, with separation and divorce rates on the rise."

Despite these challenges, Israeli women



Adi Hendel (left) with Aschella Zeneva Dankow and Eden Hanoh at the Ashkelon Resilience Center

continue to transform trauma into resilience. "It's all about the narrative – the story you tell yourself and the meaning you assign to everything you do," Shmuel says. "We're in the midst of a terrible crisis, but we'll emerge from it. By connecting to something greater and channelling our anger, anxiety, and grief

into meaningful action, that's what makes all the difference."

Shmuel also emphasises the importance of perspective. "Some people say, 'It's been 16 months, and we're still seeing the same things in Gaza.' No, we're not! We're in a different place. We're creating innovation in mental health, forming new nongovernmental organisations, mobilising volunteers. It's about the narrative – are you a victim, or are you victorious?"

Before 7 October, Israel had five resilience centres. Today, that number has tripled to 15, giving critical psychological support to affected families. These centres offer therapies such as Cognitive Behavioural Therapy; Eye Movement Desensitisation and Reprocessing; and the innovative "This Child is Me" approach, which helps entire families process trauma together.

However, the demand for mental health services is overwhelming. "Many of our therapists live in the affected areas and have experienced personal trauma themselves," says a senior resilience centre therapist. "But it's our obligation to hold hope for others." Despite rising depression and burnout, mental health professionals continue their work, driven by a commitment to healing their communities.

Faith and community have played a crucial role in the healing process. In a remarkable display of unity, the underlying tension between religious and secular women has diminished. "Haredi women have been cooking for the wives of soldiers fighting in Gaza," Hendel says. "It's often difficult for women in general to accept help, but we're learning the balance of give and take."

The trauma of 7 October has also brought to the surface the pain of past horrors. "If my grandmother survived Auschwitz and I'm here today with a beautiful family, a great career, and a fulfilling life, it gives me hope," Hendel says. "It reminds many of us that G-d always has a plan. Leaning into faith and spirituality during this time gives us the strength to believe in that plan and in the possibility of healing and renewal."

Jewish communities worldwide share a sense of purpose, prioritising family, meaningful connections, and the values of *tikkun olam* (healing the world). "Women in Israel and globally understand how important it is to be part of something bigger in order to remain resilient," Shmuel says. "Taking on a meaningful role strengthens individual and collective resilience, especially in times of crisis. This has been evident in Jewish communities across the world. People in the diaspora have rallied to support Israel, volunteering and offering help in ways that extend beyond their own lives. This connection and sense of purpose makes all the difference."

The Whale's Last Song brings solace to the child within

South African-born author **Joanne Fedler** has just released her latest book, *The Whale's Last Song*. The SA Jewish Report discusses it with her.

What inspired you to write the book?

The Whale's Last Song slipped out of me after the death of my mother, who died of cancer during the COVID-19 pandemic. During my grief, I read children's stories. It was as much as my aching heart could manage. I read all of Kate DiCamillo's books, and after reading *The Magician's Elephant*, I wondered if I could write something short, deep, and profound, that contained everything I felt.

This book is a far cry from anything you have written before. How would you describe the style/genre?

A mythic tale, a fable. It has even been described as fantasy.

What made you take the leap into a new genre?

I didn't consciously leap into a new genre, I just worked towards a story that could help me hold my pain. In times of grief, when there are no apparent answers or solutions, the heart needs a container in which joy and heartbreak can co-exist. Myths and fables help us to keep our wounded hearts open when there seems to be no medicine that will heal us. They are how we borrow joy and sorrow from elsewhere, a mythic past or an imagined future. Inside fairytales and fiction, secrets of the soul are buried like prayers, and are silently passed to us, like an imperceptible whisper, so that we feel touched by something larger than ourselves. This is why they offer solace when nothing else can.

One of the themes in the book is the lengths one goes to protect and help those we love. Does this relate to your own family?

I think all stories hold a holy question at their centre. Mine is, "How do we save the people we love?" I couldn't save my mother when she was ill. But *The Whale's Last Song*, through the language of wondering and enchantment, addresses this longing obliquely and symbolically.

Describe your main character, Teo, and what she represents for you.

She is a motherless child, one-eyed, brave, and curious, a girl whom everyone else believes is a boy. She goes on a journey to find a cure for the pox because her sister is dying. She represents the hidden self, the part of us that remembers to remember.

Describe the process of writing this book.

I listened to hours of whale song. I painted water colours. I recorded my dreams. I drew sketches. I swam in the ocean.

Was the process different to that of your other works?

It was playful, curious, and experimental, and took me way beyond the writing. I needed language and storytelling that could approximate but not directly address my grief – it was still too raw. This story did just that, drawing on poetry, imagery, imagination, and mystery.

I thought I was writing a children's book and had no agent or publisher for it until it was done. So, I wrote it mostly for me, wondering if I could write something frolicsome and poetic, deep and light. I imagined it would have illustrations and hoped it would work on those many levels that a good children's book does. In the end, I had to rewrite it for an adult audience.

What's the symbolism of the whale? Does this animal feature in your life at all?

Out in the depths of the ocean, a whale is coming to the end of its life. At first, we don't know how this relates to the story of Teo on a mission to find a cure for her sister. But this is a story about the pattern of how things fit together. The whale holds the answer to all of Teo's unanswered questions about where she comes from and what happened to her mother. Even today we don't know why whales sing or how their songs travel from one part of the planet to the other. They are creatures that still hold their mysteries away from the greedy prying hands and eyes of humans.

This book has been described as being "The Alchemist meets The Princess Bride meets The Little Prince". What do you make of that description?

I don't know if these comparisons are helpful, but people who loved those stories will likely enjoy this book. It has the enchantment of *The Princess Bride*, and the mythic reach of *The Alchemist* and *The Little Prince*. In other words, it's about more than just the story being told.

You wrote this during the pandemic, soon after your mother passed away. What impact did that have on your writing?

The voice came from somewhere in the fathoms of my childhood. I was writing for a little girl, perhaps the motherless child I had just become.

When you wrote about this book, you said you hoped readers would want to read it aloud. Why?

When you hear a story read out loud, it reminds you of being a child, being read to by a parent. It has that soothing feel of someone being beside you, reassuring you. I wanted the voice to be a comfort to a reader. I also worked very hard on the language, on every single word, and hoped it would read like poetry.

There are themes in the book about leadership and corruption. Who or what inspired this focus?

Having just lived through a pandemic, I was keen to research the plague of Seville and wasn't surprised that it coincided with witch hunts. History is filled with cautionary tales of how leaders respond to crises – especially whom they blame and persecute. The evil Marquis is based on Joseph Goebbels, who was a philologist, a master of propaganda. I have always been fascinated by the role he played in Hitler's Reich.

Explain the concept of whalefall, which is the central metaphor.

I came across the concept of whalefall in Rebecca Gigg's astonishing book *Fathoms: The World in the Whale*. When a whale dies of natural causes, it begins to sink to the deepest ocean floor, feeding millions of creatures and regenerating ecosystems. The whale is the ultimate symbol of a depersonalised generosity. When it dies, it gives everything back to the ocean so life may continue. One of the messages of the book is that humans aren't special, but just another part of life, and that sometimes risking our own safety to safeguard others and protect a world we will likely not benefit from is how we honour life, as opposed to our own lives.

What's next for you as an author?

I have just completed a memoir about losing my mother during COVID-19 called *Bring Us Home to Sorrow* which is now with my agent. I have also written 40 000 words of a book similar in style to *The Whale's Last Song* called *The Ransom of Rain* about a deaf princess in medieval Italy who is kidnapped during a drought and the ransom demanded is the return of the rains.

• *The Whale's Last Song* will be launched at Love Books in Melville on Wednesday, 12 March, at 18:00. Contact kate@lovebooks.co.za to book.



Joanne Fedler

Appliances' safety obsession drives us over the edge

My day starts at 04:00 with my coffee machine telling me what to do. She either requires me to "add water", fill her bean counter, empty her tray, or if feeling particularly spiteful, will demand that I "decalcify". "Decalcify what?" I always want to ask, but never do, either because I don't really want to know, or because I'm concerned what it will look like to Gatsby and Penny who have joined me in the kitchen, hoping for a treat.

It doesn't improve from there. The fridge reminds me, gently at first and then more urgently, if I have left it open, as if the 30 seconds it takes to take out the milk, pour it into a cup and return it, is going to have an irreparable impact on the fruit salad. And the microwave, which clearly feels like the middle child, beeps incessantly once its 30 seconds are done and until I pay it enough attention. At 04:00 it's only the old school toaster that trusts me enough not to remind me that whatever has been trapped inside it is about to set the house aflame. And I can't tell you how much I appreciate that.

My car unquestionably suffers from untreated anxiety. Apparently with safety being its number one concern, it nervously reminds me to fasten my seat belt before I have had the time to adjust the rearview mirror. It panics if it finds me wandering slightly out of the lane and keeps reminding me to look around me. And whereas I remember a time when the petrol light would illuminate at about 20km to empty so that we could play a game of "will I or won't I" make it to the garage, it now starts the gentle "maybe it's time to consider filling up" at 80km. I swear I could drive to Polokwane with that amount in the tank.

INNER VOICE

Howard Feldman



A study should be done on the link between our machinery and our anxiety. Flashing seatbelt signs, smoke alarms, and incessant notification pings, all not-so-subtle reminders of the things that have the potential to harm us. And yet, what they neglect to factor in is the impact that they have collectively on our already stretched mental health.

A conversation with a particularly smart friend who had left his watch at work the day before went as follows: "I'm not feeling great today. I didn't have my watch to tell me how well I slept." "But you said you slept!" I retorted. "Yes, but maybe I had too little REM or deep sleep. And now I'll never know. I think that's why I'm feeling anxious."

My wife has her phone alarm remind her to hydrate, other have theirs vibrate when their watch decides they need to stand, and my (anxious) car tells me when it thinks I need to have a break because I have been driving for too long.

If all this doesn't push us over the edge, nothing will.

To be fair, whereas no-one is impressed by the toaster that's willing to burn the house down without so much as a hint, somewhere between that 1980s recklessness and 2025 anxious extreme must be the answer. And just to be clear, nowhere on that spectrum should any machine have the gall to tell us that we need to decalcify. No matter what it means.

Farewell to a Johannesburg bookseller extraordinaire

>>Continued from page 9

about!" Geoff could always pinpoint a specific request remarkably quickly and then explain the differences between the first and the second edition, and ask if you have read another title by the same author.

The coming of the internet changed the Collectors Treasury business model, and more and more books were sold online with the customer base becoming international. Book parcels were couriered around the world, but at the same time, international visitors became more frequent as Collectors Treasury became a magnet for bibliophiles passing through Johannesburg.

Geoff was the founding member and first chairperson of the South African Bookdealers Association, the official body for out-of-print book dealers in Southern Africa. Geoff's vision was to improve standards of professional service to customers and allow members to speak with one voice on matters of common concern.

My one regret was that Geoff never published

his memoirs, nor did he capture all that knowledge set in his prodigious brain on paper. I only hope that something can be found that he wrote about his city, his books, and his life.

Geoff is survived by his brother, Jonathan, and sister-in-law, Jenny, niece and nephew, Mathew and Rebecca, and by his beloved partner, Gundi Weinick. Weinick has her own bookshop nestled in the new 44 Stanley complex. We wish Jonathan and Jenny every success in continuing the Collectors Treasury bookshop. Continuity in the book of life will be the most important memorial for Geoff.

• *Kathy Munro is a bibliophile/book collector, heritage researcher, and chair of the Heritage Association of South Africa.*

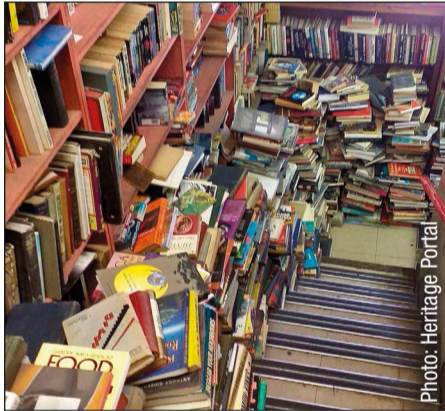


Photo: Heritage Portal

Propaganda-averse Israel losing psychological war

>>Continued from page 7

enormous sums of money to bribe the West into submission to the Palestinian message, basically Soviet Russia's [anti-Western] message.

"Generally, with propaganda, you start with children. The Saudis were funding school children's books about the Middle East, giving a specific message. The Palestine Liberation Organization [PLO] was distributing enormous amounts of books to children." The campaign extended further to university campuses in America and Europe.

"From the 1970s, the PLO invested in penetrating student unions on European and American campuses. There was a trend in Europe of anticolonialism. What they had to do was attach their political goal to the contemporary philosophy. So, Israel, which was never a colony, became colonialist.

"It worked on students who wanted to improve the world. They approached humanities and social sciences students," Schleifer said. He said the anti-Israel lobby went as far as taking students on field trips to visit refugee camps in Gaza.

"And nobody can support the Zionist movement after seeing open gutters flowing in Gaza," Schleifer said. "Israel could explain 10 times over how the PLO objected to reconstructing Gaza and installing irrigation and sewage systems, and even threatened and killed those who allowed Israel to improve their conditions.

"But you have those students that climb the ladder in media and politics, and then from Israel's point of view, it's too late."

He said further, Israeli *shlichim* go to international campuses because of the strength of their ideology rather than their linguistic capabilities, which is another shortcoming in Israeli propaganda strategy.

"Once all [Israeli] intelligence organisations admit that propaganda

is the major enemy and not nuclear Iran nor the Jordanian and Egyptian chief of staff's secret invasion plans, then [Israel] can begin copying the Palestinians copying [Israel]," Schleifer said.

Israel is an "insecure" country as the population is divided over what the future of the state should be besides the general concept of peace and security, Schleifer said. "[Israel] was founded 75 years ago. We're a very young, powerful, but insecure country. Our enemies take advantage of this insecurity.

"Hamas has broken the sense of confidence the Jews have created for themselves after 1 900 years," he said.

Schleifer explores the difference in Israeli and Palestinian mindsets at war. "[Palestinians] say that [Israel] loves life, and [Palestinians] love death. This is deterring [Israel] tremendously in the physical war. How can you deal with somebody who doesn't mind being killed, not only doesn't mind, but actively encourages it?"

He said Hamas's and Israel's enemies' psychological warfare had a real impact on Israeli decision makers.

"The [Israeli] government has yielded to the pressure. Israeli society is pressuring Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to prioritise the lives of Israeli hostages, through weekly demonstrations. This has an impact on Netanyahu's response as he cannot retaliate with extreme force to eliminate Hamas because he would be held accountable for the deaths of the hostages, Schleifer said.

"It's not a coincidence" that the hostage releases and recordings shared by Hamas of hostages "are done on a Saturday", Schleifer said. "First, to humiliate Israel. Second, it provides material for media coverage of the Saturday night demonstrations of the hostage families." He believes it's time for Israel to catch up in the psychological warfare stakes.

A column of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

Partnerships build strength

Our hearts were shattered once again last week when we received the bodies of Shlomo Mansour, 86; Ohad Yahalomi, 50; Tsachi Idan, 50; and Itzik Elgarat, 69. It's horrific to think that with the exception of Shlomo Mansour, who was murdered on 7 October and had his body taken into Gaza, the other three were kidnapped alive, and were thus murdered in Gaza. This marks the last exchange in the six-week ceasefire deal, and we hope and pray that a further deal may be reached that will result in the release of the remaining 59 hostages, who have suffered in captivity for far too long.

The unity of global Jewry through this period has been inspirational, and while the reason for this coming together is gut wrenching, the images of Israelis and Jews around the world uniting has given us some strength.

This week, South African Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) National Director Wendy Kahn is attending the Anti-Defamation League's (ADL) "Never is Now" summit in New York. This is yet another example of the work the Board has done in maintaining connections and relationships with its counterpart organisations around the world and the stellar regard in which the Board is held the world over.

The ADL, founded in 1913 – making it our younger cousin – is a New York-based international non-governmental organisation that was founded to combat antisemitism as well as other forms of bigotry and discrimination. It's thus an important international partner of the SAJBD, which is itself tasked with combating antisemitism

This column is paid for by the SA Jewish Board of Deputies

ABOVE BOARD

Karen Milner



in the South African context. In fact, at the summit, Kahn will be representing the Board and South Africa Jewry at a roundtable discussion on what can be learnt from the fight against antisemitism around the world. I cannot stress how much our international partnerships and this type of knowledge sharing helps us to combat the complex and nuanced challenges to our community.

Last weekend, in conjunction with HIAS (originally the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society), a nonprofit organisation that provides aid to refugees, we hosted the annual Refugee Shabbat. The event is a moment to reflect on the work that is being done in supporting asylum seekers and refugees, not only in South Africa but across the world. The Board has a long and proud history of providing support for the refugee community in this country, and it is proud to be associated with this meaningful event. It is so important that as Jewry, we don't forget that we have been refugees and asylum seekers. We cannot forgo the awareness that there exist so many displaced people among us who are in need of assistance and support. I congratulate Alana Pugh-Jones Baranov, who is the country director of HIAS South Africa and a former professional here at the Board, for her continued efforts to protect this vulnerable population and for the success of the Refugee Shabbat this year.

• Listen to Charisse Zeifert on Jewish Board Talk, 101.9 ChaiFM, every Friday from 12:00 to 13:00.



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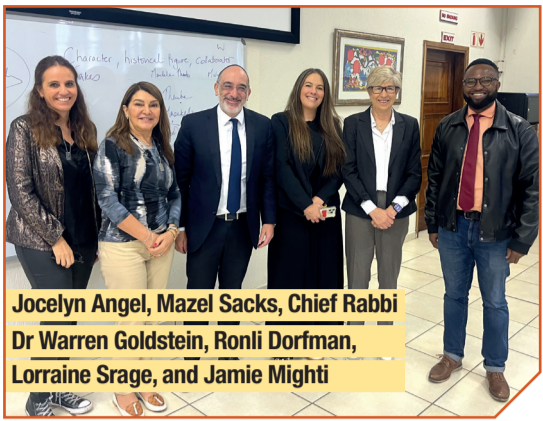
'Don't be victims,' chief rabbi tells matrices

The African National Congress (ANC), which has adopted an anti-Israel narrative, doesn't speak for the majority of South Africans and is rapidly losing support, Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein told matrices at King David Linksfield on Monday, 3 March.

Urging students to resist a sense of victimhood, Goldstein told the group that one out of every two South Africans rejected both the National Health Insurance scheme and the Expropriation Act, and that support for the ANC, now at 30%, has plummeted to the lowest levels since our first democratic election in 1994.

Goldstein said most South Africans were conservative and moderate, and he looked forward to the day when a conservative, moderate, Christian party would be established whose support would supersede the ANC.

He told students not to plead with the government, nor to ask for the recognition or voice accorded to the



Jocelyn Angel, Mazel Sacks, Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein, Ronli Dorfman, Lorraine Srage, and Jamie Mighti

as well as providing security, it has established an extensive intelligence and legal network.

He said evidence of our democracy lay in the fact that he was invited to speak at Cyril Ramaphosa's inauguration despite being vocal in his criticism of Ramaphosa on his YouTube channel. The rabbi also pointed out that he had addressed crowds of up to 30 000 outside the Union

Buildings in Pretoria and felt confident and unthreatened.

Goldstein said he had fought for the Jewish community throughout the terms of Thabo Mbeki, Jacob Zuma, and Ramaphosa, and urged pupils to maintain an unapologetic stance in the face of anti-Israel and anti-Jewish comments.

He said if pupils adopted three daily principles they would be equipped to leave the safety net of King David. These are: be true to ourselves as well as our values and principles; make an effort to learn one aspect of Torah daily; and take one step closer to keeping Shabbat.

Jewish community by our Constitution. He praised the policies of United States President Donald Trump despite their brashness, believing that they have given our government a "much-needed shake-up".

Goldstein pointed out that ordinary South Africans have the opportunity to carry out actions without being bound by the bureaucracy which exists in Europe and the United States. As an example, he spoke about CAP, which he founded 18 years ago, an organisation which now covers a radius in which 300 000 people live. CAP has exceeded all expectations, Goldstein said, and

Planning for Purim

Johannesburg

Thursday 13 March

- Sydenham Shul hosts *Wild about Purim* kids' carnival followed by *megillah* reading. Cost: R70 (R50 members). Contact: 011 640 5021
- Elevated Events in partnership with Just Bcos, Young Jewish Joburg, K Space, and The Arch host *Adar After Dark* for over 22-year-olds. Cost: R150. Bookings: www.howler.co.za/Adar_After_Dark
- Greendale Shul hosts a women's reading of *Megillat Esther* followed by a Purim dress-up party. Contact: 011 788 5036
- Victory Park Shul hosts *Purim in the Wild West*. Cost: R200 (R150 - kids aged four to 10; kids under four free). Contact: 065 891 7637
- Pine Street Shul hosts *Purim in the 60s*. Cost: R300 (R180 members). Contact: 072 033 5629
- Yad Aharon & Michael calls for the community to make and drop off *mishloach manot* for its recipients. Drop-off address: 21 Main Street, Rouxville. Contact: 011 485 2076
- Chabad of Strathavon hosts *Purim in NYC* followed by *NYC After Dark* for adults. Contact: www.jewishsandton.com/purimnyc

Friday 14 March

- Emunah hosts a women's reading of *Megillat Esther* followed by a breakfast. Cost: R220. Contact: 079 777 4988
- Chabad of Sandton hosts *Viva Purim community Mexican party*. Cost: R180 (R100 children under 12). Contact: www.chabadofsandton.co.za
- Sydenham Shul hosts a pre-Shabbos *seudah* with cocktails and *l'chaims*. Cost: R140 (R100 children). Contact: www.sydshul.co.za/seuda
- Pine Street Shul hosts *Power Hour Purim Edition* with *megillah* reading followed by pre-Shabbos cocktails and sliders. Contact: admin@pineshul.co.za
- The Chevrah Kadisha hosts a Purim *seuda* for the community. Contact: www.jhbchev.co.za

Durban

Thursday 13 March

- Umhlanga Jewish Centre hosts a *megillah* reading followed by children's activities. Contact: shul@umhlangajewishcentre.co.za



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